

Large-scale Watershed Partnerships: The Key to Quality of Water & Recreation

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Partnerships between governmental natural resource agencies and private landowners are becoming more and more common. A good example occurs between the Rathbun Land and Water Alliance (RLWA) and the Chariton Unit of the Fisheries Research Section. A research investigation is underway to describe the relationships between the Rathbun Lake watershed water quality, the fish community, and fishing.

Specifically, the RLWA was created to foster a voluntary approach to protect and enhance land, water and economic resources in the Rathbun region. Alliance members include 24 partner organizations. One of the first goals of the Alliance is to monitor water quality in the watershed and lake. But, this is just the beginning. The Alliance's next step is to assess conditions in the area that affect land and water resources. Ultimately, the Alliance will prepare and implement a management plan for the watershed that is based on results of watershed assessment and water quality monitoring.

Fisheries research benefits this partnership by monitoring stream populations. Watershed improvement, which will be implemented in the next decade, can be expected to reduce soil erosion and lake sedimentation and thus improve water quality. The stream fish community will be monitored to describe the changes that occur within the streams and lake. We anticipate improvement in stream water quality and health of the stream fish community and an increase in recreation use of Rathbun Lake.

Previous investigations showed the deleterious effects of sedimentation on crappie well being. Improvement in water quality and reduced shoreline and watershed sedimentation will greatly enhance the sportfishery at the lake. Lake Rathbun provides substantial recreational value to the area's economy; the lake has provided 5.6 million hours of fishing since impoundment in 1969, resulting in 5.5 million fish harvested while infusing an estimated \$84 million into the local economy. Additionally, wildlife habitat and hunting areas are maintained on 21,000 acres of public land adjacent to the lake and, in total, fishing, hunting, swimming, boating, hiking, camping, and wildlife viewing are enjoyed by over 1 million visitors each year.

The old adage "many hands make the work lighter" is certainly true of the partnerships at Rathbun Lake. The outcome will be a much improved ecosystem with better soil conservation, improved water quality, cleaner streams, less sediment in the lake, and improved fishing. The result of watershed partnerships can only be an asset to the environment, natural resources, and the people who enjoy them.